KOREAN FOODS
ORIGINS

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PREFACE

Noted for their sapid and aromatic flavours, Korean foods are prepared with the ingredients that have been widely used by the people.

Since olden times, the Koreans have made a rich variety of foods with locally available materials, and developed them to be more palatable to their tastes.

Each one of the foods is associated with the people's resourcefulness and talent, and they contain many substances that are good for human health and longevity.

The foods also embody the heartfelt sincerity shown by Korean women for the promotion of their family members' health.

This book introduces, through folk tales and anecdotes, some of the foods and their origins.

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Pyongyang Cold Noodles

Pyongyang, with a history of 5 000 years, has many dishes peculiar to it. Among them are well-known Pyongyang cold noodles.

Long and glossy buckwheat strips, tasty and savoury stock, appetizing garnishes–the Pyongyang cold noodles not only look good but taste great.

These sticky strips, delicious garnishes and the stock mixed with vinegar, soy sauce and mustard have a wonderful taste.

When taking the noodles on a sultry summer day, one will feel rolling sweat disappearing, and the appetite is stimulated. Pyongyangites enjoy eating the cold noodles not only in sultry summer; they enjoy eating them in mid-winter as well while sitting in a warm room. Whether they are men or women, young or old, they do not feel shy of asking for a second helping.

The following is a story about how the Pyongyang cold noodles were born.

There was an inn by the Taedong River.

The inn-keeper was a man, named Talse, who just turned forty. He had inherited the inn from his wife's parents.

The inn, though small, was patronized by many travellers, for the inn served foods prepared with buckwheat in the main.

Talse cultivated buckwheat and prepared buckwheat foods, and

served them in bean-paste soup. The dishes were delicious as they reflected the generous mind of the inn-keeper and his wife. Anybody, who took foods there, praised them.

The following is how Talse specialized in buckwheat foods.

One day, when he went to a village, he heard that a man, over a hundred years old, was living there. Forgetting that he was there to buy cereals, he went straight to that old man's house to know the secret of longevity.

The old man received him cordially before saying, "You have come to learn the secret of living for over a hundred years? Anyhow, have a seat. You think that I must have eaten tonics, don't you?"

"You are right, something like wild insam or deer's antler."

"Wild insam or deer's antler?" the old man laughed heartily and continued:

"In fact, I have neither seen them nor eaten them. Even if I saw them, how can I afford to buy such expensive tonics? For me, they are a pie in the sky. I have only eaten buckwheat foods once every two days."

"Buckwheat foods? You mean they are tonics for longevity?"

"Well, anyhow, our family members have not yet suffered from stomach troubles. Once, my grandfather told me that buckwheat is good for treating wound, sore and frequent urination. More importantly, he told me that it prevents cerebral palsy, a disease unique to the elderly."

"Is it true?"

"Anyway, I mean it might be. If not, how could a peasant like me have

lived to this day?"

Talse realized that buckwheat was an ideal tonic for humans and decided to serve the guests with the foods prepared with buckwheat.

He and his wife tried their best to prepare various dishes with buckwheat. They found a way of rolling the dough with a rolling pin, slicing it and putting the slices into boiling bean-paste soup.

However, as summer began to roll around, the guests would not empty their bowls.

It was because generally the people lost their appetite in summer and found it difficult to empty the bowls of warm bean-paste soup in sultry weather in which even animals try to find a shady place to avoid the sunshine.

Talse pondered how he could whet the appetite of the guests.

One day, he was kneading a dough of buckwheat flour with his wife, when a man knocked on the door, saying, "It's me, brother."

Opening the door, Talse saw a handicraftsman who was living behind his house. He was standing in the yard with something on his back.

Sitting on the earthen verandah under the eaves of his house, Talse said, "What has brought you here? Please take a seat."

The handicraftsman said, "Please help me remove this from my back."

Talse helped him unload it. Wiping the sweat, the neighbour said, "I have been trying to make this for a long time, and today I've finished

making it."

Unable to guess what it was, Talse stood dumbfounded.

"What is it?"

"I have long tried to repay your and your wife's benevolence, and now I can feel relieved. I have thought for several months and made this to help you. Just put a dough of buckwheat flour kneaded hard in it and press it instead of slicing the dough with a knife."

"What do you mean by benevolence? Don't mention it."

The previous year the man went to a battlefield with his newly-invented weapon and returned home heavily wounded. He was confined to bed for nearly one year. In the meantime, warm-hearted Talse and his wife helped him recover his health and did his housework. To repay their kindness, the handicraftsman made unassuming efforts to make that tool.

Talse asked, "You mean pressing it at a time?"

"What about trying it right now, brother?"

They brought it to the kitchen and placed it on the kitchen range. The wooden box for putting the dough was thick and its inner surface and bottom were covered with iron plates. And the bottom plate had numerous holes as small as darning needles.

When water started boiling, they stuffed the wooden box with dough, closed the lid tightly and put over it a piece of wood of the same size of the lid, before pressing the long handle attached to the wooden piece.

To their surprise, thin strips began to slowly come out of the tool.

"Great!"

"They look good as they are thin, but if they are not eaten soon, they will become too soft." Talse's wife said, looking at the strips falling into the boiling water.

The woman was quite experienced in cooking foods.

She scooped the strips, which were too soft and lost their gloss.

Talse and the neighbour grew disappointed.

Is my invention useless?

Talse said to his wife, "You're talking nonsense. Fruit of hard work does never come to naught. What about parboiling the strips in the boiling water just as dried bracken is parboiled?"

And he placed another dough in the wooden box.

Pressing the handle, Talse shouted:

"What are you looking at? Be quick and fill a wooden basin with cold water and then rinse the strips twice."

His wife rinsed them twice as he had said, and then drained water off them.

"That is an imitation of the way of rinsing parboiled bracken. Please put them in bean-paste soup."

The two men went outside and sat on the earthen verandah.

Talse's wife soon came out with two bowls of the thin strips.

"Why didn't you put them in warm bean-paste soup?" the neighbour asked.

"Both of you sweated a lot to press them out, didn't you? So I thought that kimchi juice would be better than warm bean-paste soup."

"That sounds reasonable. Shall we have a taste?" said Talse.

The two men had a taste of a few strips, and then started eating them with relish.

They looked as if they had gone hungry for several days.

They felt refreshed soon after they ate them; the food tasted sweet and sour and the strips passed smoothly down the throat. It took not long to empty a bowl.

They licked their lips as they wanted some more.

The neighbour said to Talse's wife, "The food is very delicious. It is enough to make a cat speak."

"What do you mean?"

"You are slow-witted, darling. He wants some more."

This time, Talse's wife joined them in tasting the food.

Talse said, "A saying goes that the more you have, the more you want. Please give me one more bowlful."

It was the third bowlful for the men. Only after emptying the fourth bowl, they felt satisfied.

"I think we have to name the food, brother. This kind of fantastic food must have its name."

"Well, you are right. Have you got any idea?"

"Listen to me. The origin of the silvery thread-like strips is cereal flour and the origin of the cool kimchi juice is water. So, what about

Pyongyang cold noodles

naming it *koksu* after *kok* (cereal) and *su* (water)?"

Talse agreed, highly praising the neighbour.

From then Talse's inn served cool buckwheat *koksu*. The travellers would ask one more bowlful of *koksu* before leaving, saying that they were eating such food for the first time in their lifetime.

The story that only one bowlful of *koksu* served by Talse's inn would help cool the bodies and feel refreshed spread rapidly across Pyongyang.

However, others could not imitate the taste of Talse's *koksu*. The secret was the taste of the spring water in the yard of Talse's house.

Later, the cold buckwheat *koksu* was called Pyongyang cold noodles.

As buckwheat contains medicinal elements like rutin, it helps prevent liver diseases and digestive disorders as well as high blood pressure and arteriosclerosis, and relieve fatigue and cure stomatitis.

Today the Pyongyang cold noodles are well known across the world as a pride of the Korean people.

Secret of Longevity

In the period of Koguryo, there lived a man aged more than 100 in a village, called Sogigol, in Pyongyang. One might guess that he must have had an extraordinary physique which enabled him to live so long. But he was a man of medium height and build.

What was extraordinary about him was his thick black eyebrows and hair and healthy complexion.

Until ten years before, his hair, beard and eyebrows had been all white. But a few years before he turned 100, they all had become black. Some knowledgeable people said that they learned in reality about the phrase *the white hair has turned black*, which they had read only in a book.

What was more surprising was the fact that his wife was also over 100.

It is a human desire to live long. Assuming that the old couple must have a secret, many people came to see them from various parts of the country.

But the secret of longevity, which the old man said to the visitors, varied and was interesting. What was more interesting was that the old couple themselves did not know the secret exactly.

One January day the royal court dispatched an elderly and experienced royal doctor to Pyongyang on a mission to learn the secret of longevity.

The secret of longevity was of paramount importance for the royal family.

The doctor came to Pyongyang together with his wife and bought a house at Sogigol, introducing himself as a peasant.

A few days later he invited the old man to a "house-warming dinner."

The table was heavily laden with sumptuous dishes, but there were only two spoons and two pairs of chopsticks on it.

The doctor said to the puzzled old man:

"Since olden times, a person who lived to be 100 has been called a heavenly being. I have invited you separately out of my respect."

The old man suggested, "Why don't we call your wife and sit together?"

"Excuse me, but we don't sit at the same table for meals. It is my family tradition. And by the way, I am around your son's age, so please drop formalities."

The doctor had a motive for having invited the old man separately. He had guessed that his secret of longevity was in his everyday food, because he, as a mere tenant farmer, could not afford to buy expensive medicines like wild insam and deer's antler.

That was why he had brought his wife who was a skilled cook, and invited the old man separately.

As he secretly watched him, he did not find that he liked or ate any particular dish more than others. He felt he had guessed wrong.

Several days later the old man invited the doctor in return. When he

sat at the dinner table, the doctor was surprised to see the old man's wife seating herself beside her husband. As though reading his mind, the old man explained with a smile:

"My family have meals all together at the same table. Eating alone does not increase appetite, however delicious the dishes may look. It is eating together that improves the taste of food."

On the table there were only boiled millet, chicken soup, seasoned edible herbs and roasted fish which seemed to have no scales. The fish was strange to the doctor. Suddenly it occurred to him that the fish might be the secret. It tasted delicious–slightly firm, sweet and somewhat oily.

"Excuse me, but what is this fish?" the doctor asked.

"Nothing special. Help yourself," the old man prevaricated.

As the old man's answer was ambiguous, the doctor drew a sigh of gratification.

This is quite amazing. It will not be difficult to find out what this fish is.

"I think you like fishing," said the doctor.

"Of course, I do. You know the Phae (the present-day Taedong) runs through Pyongyang which is beautiful and good to live in. Since my childhood I have been fond of fishing in the river. Will you go fishing with me tomorrow?"

"My pleasure."

From the following day, they went to the river. In a matter of several

days they became intimate friends.

One day the old man asked, "Hey, Grey Head. (The old man called the doctor so because his hair was all grey.) How often do you go to bed with your wife?"

"Well, not so often. Once a month, I suppose."

"Poor lad. What a wimp! I cannot wait several days."

He is bluffing. How can a 100-year-old man have sex however strong he may be? He must be kidding.

"Everyone says he can pluck a star from the sky," said the doctor.

"You have a lot of things to learn. Believe it or not, I still enjoy it."

For several days they angled gobies before the tide started to flow out.

"Today's catch is all yours. I have something to take from the swamp on the way back."

When they arrived at the swamp, the doctor closely watched the old man to find what it was he was going to take.

"I need to warm up a little here," the old man said to himself, collecting dry grass on the sunny side of the swamp. Then he took off his clothes and entered the swamp on which chunks of ice were floating. He picked up something in the water and said to the doctor, "Put this one into the sack." It was an eel, and the old man threw more of the fish.

When the doctor managed to shove them into the sack, the old man came out of the swamp and set fire to the pile of grass with a flint. To his rough calculation, the old man had caught more than a dozen of eels.

"Isn't it the fish you treated me to the other day?"

"You are too curious. There is something you don't need to know. No more asking."

The following day they went to the river again. When they unpacked their lunchboxes, the doctor found that the old man had brought the roasted fish.

"Excuse me, but please tell me the truth. What was the fish I ate that day?"

Unable to hold out any longer, the old man said reluctantly, "But if you know what it is, you might not want to eat it again."

"I beg you. Please tell me."

"All right, then. When I was a child, I had a severe earache. All medicines did not work. One day my mother heard a rumour about an old woman who was highly experienced in treating earache, and took me to the village where she lived. After examining my ear, the old woman said that I had nearly become deaf.

"Then she dropped a few drops of oil into my ear and gave a phial to my mother, telling her to use it continuously after we return home. That medicine was really wonderful. The earache disappeared in less than ten days.

"I was so grateful to her that I visited her again with cloth for her as a gift. Patting me on the back, she told me what the medicine was. It was eel oil. And the fish you want to know is an eel whose oil was taken."

"When did you start eating eel, then?" the doctor urged.

Roasted eel

"It was after I cured people of earache with eel oil. I thought it was a waste to throw away the eels after their oil had been taken. So, I have pickled them for food."

"Do your children also eat them?"

"They look creepy but taste good. All my family like them."

Having finally learned the secret, the doctor felt like flying.

Most illnesses originate from festering like earache. So, frequently eating eels will help to improve all the internal organs. But I wonder if it is easy to get eels.

As if seeing through his thoughts, the old man told him that eels were

found in all the rivers in the country and abundant especially in the Phae, and taught him how to catch and cook them. His recipe was to remove their bowels and spines, cut them into chunks and marinate them in spices before roasting them.

Several days later, the doctor returned to the royal palace.

After two months, he came back to Sogigol. He revealed his identity to the old man, and conveyed gifts from the king to him.

Subsequently, roasted eel became a special dish of Pyongyang.

A story has it that King Jangsu lived long because he liked roasted eel. (*Jangsu* means long life.)

As recent studies have shown that roasted eel contains nutrients, as well as special elements that help prevent tuberculosis, cancer and other diseases, roasted eel grows more popular worldwide.

Samgyethang
(Insam-Stuffed Chicken Soup)

Samgyethang (insam-stuffed chicken soup) is famous for its tonic properties. It came into being in the days when Kaesong was the capital of the Koryo dynasty.

In the early period of Koryo, there lived a newly-married young man, named Ma Rung, at the foot of Mt Chonma located tens of kilometres north of Kaesong.

One night in early summer he could not sleep till late. It was not because he was disturbed by the wind howling through the dense woods in the mountain or the sound of the stream rolling through rocks in front of his house.

He was recalling what had happened a few days before.

He had married a girl at Poksungagol in Kaesong the previous year.

As soon as his father who had been to Kaesong returned home, he called him and said:

"On my way back home, I dropped in on your wife's family. Your brother-in-law Man Gil is very weak. He is now only 18, in the prime of life. How can we expect he will prove worth his salt when he is so frail? Since his father fell on the front, you have to take care of him in place of his father. So go and see him tomorrow."

When he had first met him on his wedding day, Ma Rung had found

his brother-in-law was in poor health. At that time the bride had told him that her brother was a born weakling and there was nothing they could do to help him.

The following day Ma Rung went to his wife's maiden home, taking a sack of rice with him.

On hearing why he came, his mother-in-law said, "The foreign invaders are to blame for it all. But for them, your father-in-law would not have been killed in battle; then, your brother-in-law would not have remained that weak. As the family is so poor, bereft of its breadwinner, he has not been properly fed. But don't be upset so much because he is not confined to sickbed."

Having nothing else to do, Ma Rung helped his mother-in-law with trifling household chores before returning home.

"You are really a good-for-nothing," scolded his father when he learned that he had done nothing special to help his brother-in-law.

So vexed, he tossed and turned, but his wife was sleeping peacefully beside him. It made him more irritated.

It is unfair that she is sleeping carefree when I was scolded because of her own brother.

He vented his anger on his sleeping wife, only to fall asleep nearly at dawn.

When he was awakened by his wife, it was broad daylight. Sitting up, he said to her angrily, "Why didn't you wake me earlier?"

"Because your father told me not to, saying you seemed so tired," she

replied with a smile.

When he washed his face, his father handed him a pack and said:

"Give this to your mother-in-law. I managed to obtain insam. Insam is the best for treating a weak person. If he takes this, your brother-in-law will become healthy soon. A man is duty-bound to serve in the army and, moreover, to go to the front when a war breaks out. But how could he revenge himself on the enemy of his father and country in such poor health? I think he will be strong enough if we help him sincerely."

Ma Rung was deeply moved.

How considerate he is! I have failed to think like him. I deserved his scolding.

"Do not give him insam first, but send for a doctor and consult him in advance," his father advised.

He hurried to Kaesong, and sent for a renowned doctor, surnamed Sol.

After closely examining his brother-in-law, the doctor said to Ma Rung:

"Fortunately, your brother-in-law is simply weak, and has no internal illness. Nurse him well, and he will be revitalized."

Heaving a sigh of relief, Ma Rung asked, "I have a few big insam roots. What about using them for him?"

"Insam is generally known for its tonic effect. But it is efficacious when it is used properly," said the doctor, shaking his head.

Then he continued, pointing to Mt Ryongsu, "An old man, aged 90,

lives in a village at the foot of that mountain. Go and tell him that I sent you, and then he will teach you something. Do as he advises and contact me again."

After seeing the doctor off, Ma Rung went to the old man's village. When he entered the yard of the old man's house, a strapping old man was feeding dozens of young chickens.

He made a deep bow to him, and told him why he came.

Having heard him out, the old man said, "If a man becomes weak, he loses appetite, which in turn makes him grow weaker and end up contracting a serious illness. But don't worry. I have something to teach you. I am in good health and enjoy longevity. It is because I take medicinal soup prepared with young chicken every summer. I call it medicinal soup because some medicinal materials are stuffed in the abdomen of the chicken. If you take it, you will not lose your appetite even in the hottest season."

Ma Rung was dubious.

As if reading his mind, the old man said sternly, "It will do you no harm if you listen to an old-timer. Poor people cannot afford expensive medicinal materials like insam or deer's antler. That is why they have cured illness with medicinal materials they can easily obtain. You cannot enjoy extraordinary benefit if you ignore what is ordinary."

"I will keep your advice in mind," Ma Rung said apologetically.

Yes, they say that with time and patience the leaf of the mulberry becomes satin.

Picking up a black chicken, the old man added, "A chicken which is black from head to feet is the most efficacious. When a chicken hatched in spring becomes about 100 days old, the hot season begins. Such a chicken is called medicinal chicken. Remove its intestines and stuff it with three spoonfuls of glutinous rice, jujube and chestnuts and three peeled garlics. Then stitch it up and boil it hard. If you take it every three days for a fortnight, it will keep you from being affected by heat in summer and also promote your health. After all, you need to be fit in summer if you are to go through winter easily."

"But I think an adult chicken is better," Ma Rung suggested.

"You are wrong. That is why I said the key lies in what is ordinary. It seems that an adult chicken is a better choice, but its bones are hard and its flesh is tough. As for a young chicken, however, its bones and flesh are as soft as mushroom. Anyway, do as I told you, and you will see its effect. I have many young chickens, so take as many as you need," the old man said, pointing to the chickens.

Ma Rung said he would take three. Then an idea came across his mind.

"I wonder if it will be better if I add insam to the stuff."

"Good idea. I suppose insam will improve the soup's efficacy by far since Koryo insam is famous for its health-promoting effect. You are quite smart."

Ma Rung thanked him and left for his mother-in-law's home. Then it suddenly occurred to him that when young chickens were used, insam

also must be young. So he turned halfway to the doctor's house.

On hearing his idea, the doctor said, "You are right. Medicinal chicken matches well with insam. Then which insam do you have to choose? In general, the efficacy of a medicinal material changes depending on its age, as well as the age and physical condition of the man who is to use it. This holds true for insam. Whereas big insam is good for healthy adults, small one is better for children, the elderly and the weak."

"Six-year-old insam is called *yaksam* (medicinal insam) in my village."

"I see. I suppose that young insam is better for young chickens. Then how many roots of insam should you use? I recommend three, considering three is a lucky number. And I also recommend female chickens for your brother-in-law."

Ma Rung looked into his basket and examined the chickens there. To his delight, they were all female ones.

A wonderful old man! But how can I obtain young insam?

The doctor advised him to exchange his big insam roots for young ones at a pharmacy.

From that day he served insam-stuffed chicken soup to his brother-in-law every three days. After several days his brother-in-law started to improve. Whereas he could not finish his meal before, he now asked for some more.

As his appetite increased daily, his mother, elated, tried her best to satisfy his appetite and at the same time praised her son-in-law in front

Samgyethang

of her villagers.

Meanwhile, his brother-in-law, who had normally sought shade in summer, practised martial arts even under the scorching sun, cultivating his strength. When foreigners invaded a few years later, he and Ma Rung joined the army and fought courageously in battlefields, achieving brilliant feats.

Later he said to Ma Rung, “I owe my health to you. I will not forget your kindness all my life.”

“You owe it not to me but to our land. But for it, how could we

obtain insam and medicinal chickens? So let’s defend our country more firmly,” replied Ma Rung.

The day when they returned from the front, the doctor publicized the recipe of insam-stuffed chicken soup.

Thus the soup spread across Kaesong, becoming its special dish.

Now it is one of welcome dishes for Koreans.

Umegi on a Banquet Table

The original name of *umegi* was *umyogi*. Slightly chewy, sweet and aromatic and with medicinal properties, it is a special dish in Kaesong.

There is a story behind its becoming a special dish.

There lived an old man nicknamed Han Yoldul (*yoldul* means twelve) in a village during the period of the Koryo dynasty. His name was Han O Nam. He had married at a young age and fathered more than half a dozen daughters in a matter of several years.

Determined to have a son, he had tried successively, but to no avail. To make matters worse, his wife had given birth to twin girls on the eleventh try.

As he had become the father of twelve daughters in his early thirties, the villagers teased him, saying he was exceptionally skilful in fathering daughters, and nicknamed him Han Yoldul.

But his headache got bigger as his daughters grew up. With the preparations for marrying his daughters off in succession, he always toiled and moiled. Fortunately, his daughters were all pretty and could find their matches easily. At last he married them all off except for the twins, a great relief to him.

Nowadays he had a problem to solve; he had married the ten daughters to nearby villages, so he had decided to marry the remaining twins to

far-away villages. And he was racking his brains over how to greet his ten sons-in-law who were returning home in triumph from the battles against a sudden foreign invasion.

Rumour had it that the king himself would come out to receive the triumphant combatants.

When the king is doing his bit, it is quite natural that we, families of the soldiers, should do our best.

The whole village was ebullient with preparations for receiving the soldiers, slaughtering pigs, making rice cakes and distilling liquor.

Han thought over how to prepare foods more characteristic than others, but could not find one. He mulled outdoors until the dusk fell. Finally he rose up, slapping his lap. Entering the house, he ordered the twins, “Go and fetch your sisters. Now, I have some important things to discuss with them.”

When all his twelve daughters got together, he looked from one to another with an expectant eye, parental pride suffusing his face.

“As you may all know from the rumours, His Royal Highness himself will come out to receive the triumphant soldiers. We sent our own folks to the war, didn’t we? So how can we greet them with folded arms? I want your opinions.”

They took turns in offering their opinions, starting from the eldest one. Their opinions were similar in that they would prepare delicious foods for their husbands.

“Your ideas are good. But what kind of food shall we make and how?

I will contribute all glutinous rice I have in stock," Han's wife broke in.

Han and his wife had saved that rice little by little for the wedding of their twin daughters.

"As the saying goes, strike the iron while it is hot. We have to start the preparations tomorrow."

The daughters volunteered to contribute rice, sesame oil, liquid taffy, and even breeding hens.

The following day Han's home was bustling with the preparations. Once the work began, there were too many cooks, one suggesting this food and the other that.

Finally, they agreed to put the whole business under the charge of the sixth daughter Kum Dol, who was regarded as better-informed.

Kum Dol proposed making something similar to *yumilgwa* (now called *yakkwa*). As it is too oily, *yumilgwa* is eaten as a snack.

Saying that it would become a fantastic food if they combined the appetizing properties of rice cake with the peculiar taste of *yumilgwa*, they all buckled down to making it.

While some were making dough by mixing equal amounts of glutinous rice and rice powder with liquid taffy and liquor, others boiled ginger juice mixed with liquid taffy and sesame oil.

Then they made small round and flat pieces out of the dough and put a seeded jujube on the centre of each piece, on which they then printed cross stripes with their fingers.

Finally, they fried the cakes in boiling sesame oil and soaked them in

Umegi

liquid taffy.

Han Yoldul had a taste of it. It tasted wonderful–slightly chewy, soft, sweet and aromatic.

"Wonderful. I am sure my sons-in-law will like it very much. Other people will also highly praise it, I bet. Girls, let us make plenty of it and serve it to our soldiers."

They went to the garrison to greet the soldiers.

When the soldiers arrived, their families greeted them in tears of joy.

After a while a horn bugle sounded signalling lunchtime.

The families scattered in a wide field near the garrison.

Han's family, together with his in-laws, sat around a spread of dishes.

"Excuse me, but I propose offering this food to the commander who took warm care of his men and brought about today's victory with his adroit tactics," suggested the husband of Han's eldest daughter, with his eyes riveted on the newly-invented food.

"It's a wonderful idea," Han replied.

"Thank you. But how do you call it?"

"Oh my!" Han exclaimed frustratingly. He had been so engrossed in making it that he had forgotten to name it.

"It's not too late," the father of Han's first son-in-law broke in.

"But how?"

"It's quite simple. What about calling it *umyogi* in the sense that it is permeated with the devotion of the women to their husbands?"

Han heartily agreed on the simple yet meaningful name.

Thus the newly-invented food *umyogi* was offered to the commander, who, after hearing the whole story associated with it, recommended it to be served at the banquet in honour of the victorious soldiers to be held a few days later at the royal palace and its compound. Eating *umyogi*, those who attended the banquet felt the sincere devotion of women to their husbands. Soon, it was widely known as a special food of Koryo.

Later its name was changed into *umegi*, and it spread across the country to become a favourite food among the Koreans.

Origin of Soybean Sprouts

Soybean sprouts can be seen on meal tables in any part of Korea. Easy to raise, they are rich in vitamin C, and whet the appetite.

In the days of Koguryo a couple lived at a village at the foot of Mt Ryongak in Pyongyang.

Ko Jin Gang, the husband, was an upright man with powerful physique, and Namuri, the wife, was a beautiful and kind-hearted woman. Their life was full of harmony.

There was a funny story about the wife's name. The father of Namuri was the only son for three generations. He fathered the first child in his forties, and a daughter at that.

All the family members including the grandfather felt sad, reproving him for fathering not a boy, and finally named her Namuri (reproach in English).

Unlike her name, the girl was outstandingly clever and grew up, enjoying the love of all the family members.

Her grandfather, an elder of the village, married her to Ko Jin Gang who had won two times in the martial art contest in the county.

Ko Jin Gang and Namuri diligently worked, and the intimacy between them increased as days went by.

One spring day, Ko Jin Gang and other young people in the village went to a battle site on hearing that foreigners invaded the northern

border area.

Namuri went as far as to the entrance to the village, and said to her husband, “Please take care.”

“You take care of yourself. Understand?”

“You are going to the battle site, aren’t you?”

After her husband left, Namuri worked diligently, looking after family affairs in and out.

One day, when she was harvesting soybeans in the field she had reclaimed at the foot of a mountain, she saw Makdong, her neighbour, running to her out of his breath.

Has anything gone wrong?

Makdong said to her, “Hi. A big problem. Our soldiers at the border are falling sick, they say. Your husband is bed-ridden for several days.”

Suddenly Namuri felt dizzy.

Back at home, she sat by a loom as usual, but she failed to weave even a roll of cloth. She hurried to make preparations; she packed rice and soybeans and made clothes for her husband.

All the families in the village prepared cereals, clothes and medicines for their sons and husbands.

Some days later, representing the village, Namuri and Makdong left with all the things the villagers had prepared. When they arrived at the military camp, the situation was beyond imagination. More than one half of the soldiers had fallen sick, and some who managed to get along had their skins chapped, their arms and legs got stiff, and they lost appetite.

Soybean sprout kimchi

Namuri volunteered to cook foods for the patients and nurse them; she prepared porridge with rice and ground soybeans, decocted medicinal herbs, and laundered the soldiers’ clothes.

After some days, the patients’ conditions improved. They began to eat foods and move their arms and legs; they were all active.

Namuri served them foods prepared with soybeans.

Some more days passed, and soldiers began to leave the sickbeds. But some still would not sit at the meal table, saying that they felt a false sense of satiety and they were suffering from bad digestion.

Namuri thought that it was a result of eating soybean foods at every

meal. She grew anxious. It would be better if there were vegetables, but it was early winter with cold winds blowing, and she could not find even wild edible greens. She wandered the sunny mountain slopes, but she failed to get anything.

One day, while making preparations for cooking a meal, she opened the cover of a wooden vessel at a corner of the kitchen, and saw that soybeans had produced new shoots. She had soaked soybeans before to prepare a meal, but as she had thought the amount was too much, she had left about a bowlful of them.

Oh, dear, what should I do with them?

Unable to throw away the sprouted soybeans, she removed only the rotten ones and cleansed the others. She thought she could boil them together with bean-curd dregs.

The following morning, she first looked at the vessel. White sprouts had already grown as long as a knuckle, and the bowlful of soybeans covered the whole vessel.

Shall I boil soup with these sprouts? These sprouts are also a kind of grass, aren't they?

She washed the soybean sprouts and boiled soup with them. She boiled them hard until the strange, bad taste of soybeans was removed, and seasoned the soup with soy sauce. Everybody praised the soup, saying that it tasted good and chewing soybean sprouts was exotic.

A young soldier emptied the bowl for the first time, and asked one more bowlful, saying, "Today's soup is special. More delicious than

other soybean foods. The stomach ache has vanished. You have a wonderful skill. You are mysterious as you prepared such a wonderful dish with the same soybeans."

Namuri had another thought. If she prepared dishes with soybean sprouts, they would be good for digestion and whet appetite; furthermore, she could serve a lot of people with a small amount of soybeans.

Namuri began to grow soybean sprouts. She made a big wooden jar, covered its bottom with sand and put sprouted soybeans over the sand. And she covered the jar with a piece of cloth and watered them several times a day.

She pickled soybean sprouts which were as long as a span, and boiled them slightly to make salad or fried them. Sometimes she would cool the slightly-boiled sprouts and seasoned them with salt, spring onion and garlic, and put them in a jar; some days later, it became delicious and aromatic kimchi.

After having those foods, no soldier lost his appetite, and there were no symptoms of the skins stripping off and chapping.

The soldiers, who regained their health thanks to the devotion of Namuri, stepped up training. Inspired by their high spirits, the commanders ordered an attack. The soldiers attacked the enemy's positions and repulsed them.

In this way, soybean sprouts have been used widely since olden times thanks to the creative wisdom of a Korean woman.

Soybean sprouts, rich in vitamin C, enjoys popularity.

Wonder of a Gourmet

The following happened in the autumn of 936 in Luoyang, the capital of the Later Tang dynasty which existed between 923 and 936 in the northern part of China.

At that time, a mission of Koryo led by Minister Hyongsun was staying there at the invitation of the king of Later Tang.

A light autumn wind was slowly cooling down the roof of the inn which had been heated up under the mid-day sunlight, and Ingil, who was so busy preparing lunch for the mission, found a shelter under a tree after finishing his work. He was a cook at an office in charge of receiving foreign guests to Koryo and preparing banquets for them.

He was reminded of how Wang Jing, an official of Later Tang, had visited the inn with his country's chefs.

Wang Jing was a man of wide knowledge and good taste, and for this he became famous in his government. He had been born into a famous family enjoying wealth and prosperity for generations, and grown up eating delicacies prepared by skilful cooks. So he had been very fastidious about foods. If he was served with foods that were not to his liking, he would grow furious.

He had become interested in the foods from other countries. In order to learn the secrets behind Koryo foods, he had frequently visited the inn, where Koryo's mission was staying, with his royal chefs.

Some days later, he said:

"Finally I have learned all the secrets behind Koryo foods, ranging from barbecue to glutinous-rice cake, bean curd soup and cucumber kimchi. Perhaps Koryo cooks will not be able to prepare any special dish that I don't know at the farewell banquet. Even though I may not be invited to the banquet, I would not feel any regret."

As his words were plausible, Koryo's mission members nodded their heads. But Ingil felt unhappy as he thought that Wang Jing, who, until the previous day, had been nagging him to teach him the secrets behind Koryo foods, while praising the foods were the best, had said so.

"What are you thinking about so seriously?"

It was Pomrung, the senior cook.

"Wang Jing said that we cannot set any special dish at the banquet table. It's irritating to think about it."

Pomrung laughed heartily, and then got serious.

"They say care kills the cat, but we cooks should have to worry about it."

In fact, Pomrung was also worried about the coming banquet. At that time, the duty of the mission was not for trading, but for reaching an agreement on cooperation between the two countries to attack any other country when it invaded either of them. So the cooks of Koryo satisfied the wish of Later Tang's people to learn the secrets behind Koryo foods, and, as the purpose of the mission was achieved successfully, the senior cook had been planning to arrange a grand banquet.

"Wang Jing may not know the secrets behind all our dishes. Let's make the table full of sumptuous delicacies and invite him. You are skilled in making rice cakes. You can surprise him with your skills."

Ingil grew proud. His forte was stuffing rice cakes with honey, taffy, roasted sesame and beans and dried persimmon so that they could taste sweet, savoury and sapid.

He ran into the kitchen.

Two days later Ingil still could not present an exotic delicacy. He could not even imagine how it should look like. Suddenly he was reminded of an old tale of Later Tang.

The first sovereign emperor of the Jin dynasty, who unified his empire, was a sceptic. If he caught a piece of fish bone in his throat while eating foods, he would have the responsible chef beheaded without any mercy, claiming that the man attempted on his life.

One day a chef, struck by a feeling of terror, mangled fish on the dressing board before he knew it. Time went by, and he hurriedly rolled the mangled fish flesh into balls and fried them. To his surprise, the emperor ate the dish with relish, saying that it was delicious.

Remembering the tale, Ingil thought.

A special food is one that is prepared with a kind heart. That dish prepared with a feeling of terror cannot be a special food. I will prepare a special food associated with the feeling of the kind-hearted Koryo people.

One thing attracted his eyesight. That was glutinous rice balls to be

used for rice cake soup. He hit upon a new idea.

What about rolling glutinous rice dough into dumplings and coating them with honey? A food of a different shape is a new one for sure. Then I can coat them again with roasted soybean flour, powdered pine nut and sesame. The food will become aromatic and taste sweet, savoury and sapid.

After listening to him, the senior cook added his ideas.

"Good idea. But I think if the dumplings are made with only glutinous rice, they may become too sticky. What about kneading the dough with equal amounts of glutinous rice and ordinary rice?"

As they had a taste of the food, the cooks were unanimous in praising it.

Ingil asked the senior cook to name the food.

"The dumplings look like round beads. What about naming it *kyongdan* (round bead)?"

All the cooks agreed with him.

The following day the farewell banquet was held. As they saw the tables spread with delicacies, officials of Later Tang were struck with wonder.

The head of Koryo's mission suggested to Wang Jing that he have a taste of *kyongdan*, saying, "This food was prepared by a young cook, and its name is *kyongdan*."

After tasting the food, Wang Jing felt how foolish it was for him to say that he knew all the secrets behind Koryo foods. And looking round

the delicacies on the table, he exclaimed.

Even those who cook for officials try to add glory to their country. Their country is really a powerful nation.

Kyongdan prepared by Ingil contributed to glorifying Koryo, and since then *kyongdan*, as a special food of Koryo, has been handed down through the generations.

Yumilgwa, Special Food of Koryo

This happened in the early days of Koryo.

Kidal, who had been a chef in the royal palace, was immersed in thought.

Inheriting the recipe of his ancestors, Kidal became a professional in making *tasik* in the royal palace of Koryo.

But for some reason, the king, who used to eat *tasik* with relish, would not take it as days passed. Of course, the king lost his appetite, but Kidal thought his recipe was outdated.

Even though he returned home after a month's absence, he was lost in thought without going to bed.

His wife urged, "Wouldn't you go to bed, darling?"

He got into bed, but he couldn't get to sleep quickly.

The following morning, after the sun rose, he woke up and was in a hurry to set off. Looking at him, his wife told him that a eunuch had said that Kidal was allowed a leave of about 10 days. She asked him to see a doctor.

On his way back home from the doctor with his wife, Kidal was passing a market.

While looking round the market, he saw a food counter.

As a chef, he could not help going towards it. He looked at the foods sold there, but there was nothing so special.

At home, he lay down in his room.

His wife called him.

"Please get up."

"Stop bothering me."

"Will you have a taste of this?"

"What is it?"

It was a pancake, not made of kaoliang but of wheat flour.

"It is not a specialty."

"Make a comment after tasting it."

She gave him a pancake on a chopstick after coating it with liquid taffy.

"Then let me taste one."

Unlike its appearance, it was really tasty. He wolfed down the savoury and sweet pancake.

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it at the market."

He motioned his wife to stop saying any more. An idea was flashing into his mind; the food looked like *tasik* fried in sesame oil or a wheat flour pancake coated with honey, not with liquid taffy.

"Oh, yes. I got it."

Leaving behind his moaning wife, he ran to the palace. He directly went into the kitchen and began to make a food in his own way.

He mixed wheat flour with sesame oil, kneaded the dough and left it as it was for some minutes. Then he kneaded the dough again until it

became glutinous, and pressed it with the mould of *tasik*. He fried the pressed pieces in the boiling sesame oil, quickly piercing them with a stick so that they could be soaked with the oil evenly.

"Time's up."

He took the well-boiled, yellow pieces out of the wok and put them in a vessel of honey. Then he picked one by one the pieces fully soaked with honey, putting them on a tray, and sprayed pine nut powder over them.

Having a taste of one of them, he found it incomparably more delicious than *tasik* or wheat flour pancake.

The feeling of chewing was special–soft and crisp–and the food seemed to be melting of its own accord in the mouth. The sweet, savoury and sapid taste lingered in the mouth for a long time.

In fact, it could be called a best food among those made of flour.

What can its name be?

Names of things had to be those which can fully explain the things. Kidal found the name easily. He named it *yumilgwa* as people could have it at a meal or as a snack.

"*Yumilgwa*… "

That day the food enjoyed popularity in the royal palace.

Yumilgwa became widely known in the world as a specialty of Koryo.

The commoners, who could not afford to buy honey, soaked it in liquid taffy, hence *yumilgwa* soaked in honey or in liquid taffy.

Yakkwa

Later *yumilgwa* became one of the Koreans' favourite foods for holidays.

Now it is called *yakkwa*, which is made by mixing the dough with honey, sesame oil and liquor.

Ryongbongthang

In the early period of the Koryo dynasty, a young man, named Soeung, lived with his widowed father in Jaraul (Terrapin Village) at the foot of Mt Pongmyong.

The man and his wife did their best for the old father.

As the father became older, he lost his appetite day by day.

Looking at his father, the son was reminded of his childhood.

He had lost mother when he was young.

His father had begged for breast milk for the baby.

Unforgettable was the fact that his father would eat porridge mixed with grass when he had given his son boiled millet.

Moreover, his father had sustained an injury because of him.

In summer five years before, the father and the son had been seconded to building a fort.

At that time Soeung, who had had uneasy sleep for over 15 days, had almost been buried by the collapsing earthen wall while sleeping in a hole in the ground. At that time, his father, who had been out to find him, pushed him away and got under the earth. As a result, one of his legs had been broken.

When he saw his father walking with the help of a stick, he could not but feel sorry.

He tried to fulfil his filial duty, but his father lost his appetite as

he grew older.

He thought that the old saying–that when one thought to do one's best for one's parents, they had already passed away–was right.

That night his wife said to him:

"After a few months it is your father's birthday. How can I prepare a birthday spread better than last year?"

Soeung got deeply impressed.

"Thank you for your care, but can't we serve him better foods not only on his birthday but also in other days?"

"What about terrapin soup? The blood, shell and flesh of the terrapin are all tonics, and the soup boiled with it is very delicious, they say. When I did laundering on the riverside, I saw many big terrapins."

Soeung was against his wife's opinion.

"Don't you know about our village? The villagers haven't caught terrapins since olden days. If there's no terrapin, how can it be called the Terrapin Village?"

"Oh dear, what is the need of a treasure if it is not for humans? The villagers haven't caught them in order to increase their number. This doesn't necessarily mean that one must never catch them to eat. The terrapin soup is good for the weak elderly. It is not wrong to catch a few for the father."

She is right. If there's anything good for people, it must be used. It would be right to use it while seeing to it that it doesn't become extinct.

Soeung woke up early the following morning, and caught a large terrapin.

At the breakfast table, the old man said:

"I know your sincerity. But, think about this. There are several old men in our village, and if I eat a terrapin breaking the traditional rule, what will they say? I will take this today, but never catch any more. It will be a good idea to discuss with other villagers before catching it if you are in need of one."

That evening, Soeung and his wife promised to do their best for the father's meals and for his approaching birthday.

From next day, the man collected firewood and sold it.

On the early morning of his father's birthday, he bought some big carps and gave them to his wife.

His wife said:

"Can't we cook a characteristic food with the carps? What about boiling soup with the carps and chicken? The food will contain the spirits of the river and the mountain. Any other idea?"

"No. Even the rich would never have tasted it. Chicken can be like phoenix and carp, like dragon. It can be called *ryongbongthang* (soup of dragon and phoenix). It will be a dish we can be proud of in front of the world."

In the morning, his home was crowded with the old men in the village.

Seeing the wonderful *ryongbongthang*, they exclaimed:

"This is a splendid soup."

Ryongbongthang

On hearing the story associated with the special food, they lavished praises on the young couple for their filial piety.

Later, it became a famous longevity food, and even was put on the royal meal table.

Jongukjang Treats a Cold

It was hard to see an inch ahead because of the snow falling heavily, and the wind was blowing hard. People were walking along the road braving the snow and wind.

It was December 1011, and the king and his subjects were on the way to take shelter from foreign invaders.

Looking at the royal palanquin, Ri Uk, the royal doctor, could not feel at ease. The king was coughing more frequently as time went by.

Ri Uk called the officer in charge of the royal guards.

"We must drop in at any village so that His Royal Highness could get his body warm. He caught a cold a few days ago, and it's getting from bad to worse. We mustn't delay any longer."

"Ok. Even the horses may fall soon."

On reaching the nearest village, the royal procession stopped and lodged there.

The king was taken to a house whose floor was made hot, but the fever would not go down. He coughed violently during the night. And to make matters worse, he lost appetite.

Food is the best medicine. If he can eat, he may get better.

Ri Uk's worry grew. He prepared medicines and special dishes, but the medicines did not prove effective, and the king would not eat the dishes.

Three days later the senior chef for the royal meal came to see Ri Uk.

"There is no bean paste to set on the royal meal table, sir. I thought you had to be informed of this in advance as you're in charge of tasting the foods for His Royal Highness."

"What are you talking about? What does it mean that there is no bean paste?"

There was a reason for his surprise. The king liked bean paste more than other foods. He had not eaten anything without bean paste before. No bean paste? It was a big accident.

"Anyway do you have some for the royal meal?"

"Only a bowlful …" the chef faltered.

"Oh, dear. Are you really in charge of royal meals? Don't you know that His Royal Highness doesn't have a meal without bean paste? I'm also to blame for it."

"I had to keep the bean paste for the royal meals. I knew that there was no bean paste left in this village after hearing the fact from a cook."

The fact was that over a hundred people from the royal palace had come and had meals with bean paste in the village of a few houses. And they had suddenly left and failed to take much bean paste; to make matters worse, some earthen jars filled with bean paste had broken on the rough roads.

His Royal Highness likes to eat bean paste more than sumptuous foods. If he doesn't eat bean paste, his illness will grow serious.

This thought made Ri Uk feel frustrated. At that time he fully realized

how important bean paste was in human life.

Since ancient times the Korean people had seasoned foods with bean paste or soy sauce. So the tastes of dishes were the tastes of bean paste or soy sauce, and the tasty foods whet the appetite. But there was little bean paste left now.

He went out to visit the houses to ascertain whether it was true.

At the first house he came across a nearly 50-year-old man, surnamed Kwak.

When he explained why he came, Kwak said that there was no bean paste in his house, as he had washed its jars two days before, and he continued, "Among the several households in the village, some escaped and only a few are remaining. But after you have come, you have eaten all the bean paste in the village."

On hearing this from Ri, ministers were so embarrassed that they were at a loss for words. After a few minutes, they discussed how to cope with this difficulty.

They agreed with Ri that they should send some soldiers to look for bean paste.

Ri visited Kwak again.

"We're going to send some soldiers to obtain bean paste. Please get us a guide among the villagers."

"It is useless to send the soldiers through this howling snowstorm. It will probably be the same case with other villages. Please endure for three or four days. Maybe there is a way then, I hope."

"*Maybe*? Do I have to believe in *maybe*?"

The soldiers and a villager guiding them left the village through the snowstorm.

Ri Uk could not but serve the king with foods seasoned only with salt.

The king closed his eyes at the meal table, but as if he was reminded that he could remain alive only when he ate anything, he took a few spoonfuls of rice, and then put down the spoon, saying, "If only there was bean paste …"

While taking foods, the ministers also said, frowning their faces, "A few meals with only salt as seasoning has taught us that bean paste is more precious than gold."

The soldiers, who had left to obtain bean paste, failed to come back even after two days. There was no knowing whether they were roaming to get bean paste or died of cold.

On the third morning Kwak came to the house, where the royal foods were prepared, with something wrapped in a cotton blanket.

He removed the blanket in front of Ri Uk. It was a small wok. The wok was still steaming. Perhaps he had brought the boiling wok.

The smell was so appetizing.

Ri Uk asked Kwak, who was putting the wok on a fire pot.

"What's that? It smells good."

"I prepared spring onion soup with *jongukjang*. This kind of soup is efficacious against the cold, so they say. I've heard His Royal

Highness has caught a cold."

Ri Uk hurriedly opened the lid of the wok. A nice smell of bean paste soup emitted.

He first had a taste of it, and ordered it to be served to the king.

With a maid holding a bowl of the soup, he entered the room, where the king was staying.

"Your Royal Highness."

There was silence. He called again loudly but it was the same.

He was struck with apprehension.

Has the bad cold taken his life?

He slightly pulled the king by the sleeve.

"Leave me alone."

The king's voice was faint.

Only then did Ri Uk heave a sigh of relief.

"Please have a meal."

"Don't you know why I don't eat any food? I'm grateful for your sincerity, but if it is not bean paste, don't offer me any food."

"Your Royal Highness, it is good news. I've managed to obtain spring onion and bean paste soup, and … ."

Ri Uk could not finish his words.

The king rose up abruptly.

"What did you say? Where is the soup?"

Disregarding the manners appropriate to a monarch, the king took the soup bowl from the maid. Originally, kings had not taken food while

holding a vessel with their hands; they had only eaten foods with spoons and chopsticks.

He blew the steam slowly, and drank a gulp.

A smile lit up on his pale face, and his eyes glittered.

He drank all the soup.

Ri Uk marvelled at the sight.

Yes, the king is now alive. How can a bowlful of soup resuscitate him?

The king's face became rosy, and sweat began to trickle down his face.

After drinking the soup, the king said as if regaining his royal posture, "I'm alright."

He soon fell asleep as if he had been drunk. He didn't wake up till the sun rose. He woke up only by lunchtime.

"I feel so comfortable. The soup is quite mysterious."

The ministers felt happy at his words.

The king said to Ri Uk, "The soup I ate in the morning is wonderful. It not only tasted good but also treated the cold. Where did you find bean paste? Did the soldiers who went to get bean paste come back?"

"They haven't come back yet. A man in this village prepared the soup for you, Your Royal Highness."

"I can't understand. A bowl of soup treats a cold?"

"I don't know the secret, either, Your Royal Highness. I just had the soup served to you as it was prepared by that man."

"Um, call him. He is the saviour of my life."

When Kwak arrived, the king lavished praises.

"I have restored my energy thanks to the soup you prepared. I can never forget the soup. It is obvious that your village has run out of bean paste as more than one hundred people from the royal palace are staying here, but you managed to prepare the bean paste soup for me. Is there any secret? Maybe you have kept bean paste for me and prepared the soup. Right?"

"I'm sorry, it is not true, Your Royal Highness. All the villagers including me offered our bean paste to the people from the royal palace."

Kwak then explained how the bean paste came into being.

Whenever water dropped in the jars where bean paste was kept in the rainy season or animals broke them, people made instant bean paste, and called it *jongukjang*. *Jongukjang* could be eaten four or five days after steaming soybeans and fermenting them.

They made *jongukjang* in the following way. First they boiled soybeans hard, spread them on straw (this must be rice straw), placed them in a warmer part of the room and covered them with blankets or quilts. The period of their fermentation varied according to temperature, humidity and ventilation, but after 2-3 days the soybeans were covered with mold and stuck together. These were dried quickly, ground with mortar or millstone and mixed with boiled salty water. They called this *jongukjang*.

Despite his detailed explanation, the king was dubious.

"You mean that the instant bean paste gives the original

flavour, right?"

"Yes, Your Royal Highness. A saying goes that a daughter-in-law cannot be worked on the first day of wedding, but beans can be eaten from the first day when they are prepared for making paste; we sometimes eat bean paste on the first day of its fermentation because it retains its original flavour."

"What a good saying!"

"Thank you, Your Royal Highness."

"I have regained strength thanks to the bean paste associated with the wisdom of the country people and was cured of the cold thanks to the spring onion and bean paste soup. I feel very pleased. But what I wonder is that I have never heard that spring onion and bean paste soup treats a cold, but I'm now cured of the cold thanks to that soup. Do the doctors use this therapy, Ri? Or is it recorded in any medical book?"

"I have never heard about such a therapy."

The king said admiringly.

"Um, a country peasant knows more than a royal doctor does. *Jongukjang* and the soup prepared with it and spring onion, unknown to the royal court, are treasures. There will be more treasures in the countryside, I believe. What do you think? Aren't the peasants like that man talents?"

"You are right, Your Royal Highness."

Kwak brought the newly-made bean paste.

Ri Uk offered it to the king.

After having a taste of it, the king exclaimed.

"Good, sweet like honey. I can't believe such a talent lives in the countryside."

Some days later the news that the soldiers repelled the foreign invaders and defended the country's dignity came.

The king and his entourage returned to the royal palace.

At the proposal of the royal doctor, the king awarded a prize to the country peasant. And he used to say that commoners were clever whenever he recalled *jongukjang*.

After that *jongukjang*, which was created in the countryside, was widely used in cooking even in the royal palace.

Glutinous Rice *Kochujang*

In the last days of the feudal Joson dynasty there lived the Kims at the foot of Mt Songak.

Jang, the granddaughter-in-law of the Kims, became full of worries in the hottest period of one summer; her grandfather-in-law lost his appetite.

It had been said that people over 60 were unusually sensitive to the cold and the heat and lost their appetite as time went by because they had become old and weak, but Jang thought that she lacked sincerity in attending to the old man.

How can I recover his appetite? If I could prepare refreshing bok choy kimchi… . But where can I get bok choy in summer? Oh, yes. We Koreans are fond of foods only when they are seasoned with chilli whether it is meat soup or vegetable dish. People like kimchi because it is seasoned with chilli. How about making bean paste have the taste and aroma of chilli?

Jang seasoned bean paste with chilli and asked her mother-in-law to have a taste of it.

"It is better than simple bean paste."

The following morning her grandfather-in-law had fresh lettuce and the bean paste.

"Wonderful. The same lettuce, the same boiled millet and the same

bean paste but mixed with chilli. Today's breakfast is special."

That day he ate the meals with relish. In this way he regained his appetite and went out to practise archery.

Summer went by and autumn rolled around.

One day Jang felt uneasy as she noticed that the old man again lost his appetite. He even did not touch the bean paste mixed with chilli.

Her grandmother-in-law consoled her, saying that the elderly were fastidious about foods.

A few days before New Year's Day Jang saw a jar on the earthen verandah. Porridge for making taffy was maturing in the jar. She thought about mixing malt powder with the porridge. When malt powder was added, the porridge would taste sweet.

She expressed her opinion to her grandmother-in-law.

"Don't be obsessed with it. They say care kills the cat. I once tried it, but the end product was not desirable. Our dishes are not inferior to those of the noblemen. Please take it easy."

Still flashing before her mind's eye as she was preparing a meal was the image of malt powder mixed with chilli.

She says it is no use mixing malt with bean paste. Then what about spicing the kneaded dough for rice cake with chilli? If salt is added, it will taste salty as well as hot and look red. And the malt will ferment the glutinous rice, making it taste sweet and whetting the appetite.

That night she felt she could not get asleep without practising what she had conceived. She woke her husband.

"Will you please help me, darling?"

"What?"

On hearing what she had to say, he was quite moved.

Though it was in the dead of night, the young couple kneaded a dough of glutinous rice, sprayed malt powder, salt and chilli powder over it and kneaded it again. The more they kneaded, the better the dough looked as the red colour of chilli soaked out.

"It makes my mouth water, dear. It will be the best dish in the world."

"I have nothing to regret if it stimulates your grandfather's appetite."

"Heaven will be by your side."

They put the red dough into a pot, and covered it tightly.

On the morning of New Year's Day, youngsters of the family paid New Year greetings to their seniors, and they all sat by the table rich with dishes. The foods, though simple, looked delicious and beautiful.

The old man, while looking at the dishes, pointed his finger at a red food on a white plate.

"I think I haven't seen such a dish before."

"This is a side dish prepared by your granddaughter-in-law."

"Well, let me have a taste of it."

He had a taste of it with chopsticks.

"Oh, look. It tastes sweet, hot, salty and aromatic. Let me try it on the bok choy leaves. Great. I have never felt such a good taste. Why are you all looking at me? You try, too."

As the whole family was eating the side dish, the old man said:

"People say that time tries things, but this dish doesn't need time. It is regrettable that we are eating this excellent dish only by ourselves. Let's make all the villagers have a taste of it. By the way, how should we call it? What about calling it glutinous rice *kochujang*?"

So, glutinous rice *kochujang* spread across the village.

The people did not feel fed up with the food however much they ate it, and eating boiled rice with the *kochujang* was enough without any other side dishes.

Koreans, who are used to eating glutinous rice *kochujang*, would take it with them when they go to foreign countries.

As the foodstuff is associated with Jang's piety to her seniors and retains its original taste, it still draws people's interest.

A Tale of *Sundae*

There lived in a village a young man, named Se Hun, with his mother. He was so poor that he worked as a servant for the landlord, surnamed Kwon, in the same village.

Years passed.

Many people wondered which family would marry its daughter to the servant of another man, but a family agreed to marry its daughter to the upright and hard-working young man.

But with the day of his marriage approaching, his mother grew anxious for the family could hardly afford a wedding ceremony.

One day, the landlord called Se Hun, and ordered him to throw away a dying piglet. The man had felt uncomfortable as his house would have a dead body on the coming first day of the new year.

Se Hun could not throw away the piglet which was dying as it had been trampled down by other piglets, so he brought it to his house. On learning about it in detail, his mother put it on the warmer part of the floor, and began to take care of it.

She picked broad bellflower and licorice roots, and made decoction with medicinal herb roots; she also pressed sap from radish. As the piglet ate the decoction and sap every day, it was cured of coughing after some days, and began to eat with relish. Se Hun and his mother did not know how time passed as they saw the piglet gaining weight day after day.

Three months later the piglet grew up.

The mother thought:

Please grow fat as soon as possible for my son's wedding. How lucky we are!

A few days before Se Hun's wedding, when she and her son were looking at the pig with satisfaction, the landlord appeared.

"Is it true that you brought my piglet and made it your own?"

Se Hun's mother could not say anything for a while.

"What do you mean? You remember that you ordered my son to throw away the dying piglet, don't you? We saved it with a great deal of effort. But now you are saying … ."

"What? When did I tell him to throw a living piglet? What the hell are you talking about?"

The landlord began to threaten them.

"Cut the chatter, and send the pig to my house by tomorrow morning. My daughter's wedding will be held two days later, and I've been worrying about how I could obtain a pig for the ceremony."

"I beg you, Your Honour. My son's wedding will also be held two days later. But if you take the pig, what should we do? My family's fortune depends on this pig, but if you take this, how will we hold the son's wedding and keep on living in the future?"

His mother knelt down in front of the landlord and begged.

Se Hun standing next to his mother clenched his fist as if he would beat the landlord there and then.

Feeling afraid of his threatening look, the landlord said in a softened voice.

"Then, let's make a deal. You slaughter the pig, take its head and viscera for Se Hun's wedding and send me the rest. It is a reward for having raised the pig. Others must have taken it as a whole, but I show my generosity for Se Hun's wedding. We have lived in the same village for a long time, haven't we?"

The landlord's face was expressive of a cunning smile.

As he went out of the house, Se Hun's mother could not but look at his back.

"Damn it! I will throw the pig into a river."

Se Hun rushed towards the pigsty with his hands clenched.

"What are you doing, son? It is no use doing that. Anyway, you are his servant."

As a result, the family was deprived of the pig, and got only its head and viscera.

Se Hun pitifully looked at his mother washing the intestines of the pig.

"Well, what are you cleaning the intestines for?"

"I am going to make *sundae*."

"*Sundae*?"

His mother explained:

"Once upon a time a hunter hunted a bear in the mountain. But he had no pot for boiling it. After much thought, he cleaned the bear's intestines,

put its flesh and blood in them and roasted them. It tasted delicious, it is said. From then, the hunter did not throw the viscera of animals. He cooked them in that way and called it *sundae*."

"So, that's why you are washing the intestines."

He helped his mother washing the intestines and cutting dried radish leaves. As the stuffed intestines were thoroughly boiled, they took them out. Soon a big wooden box became full of *sundae*.

On the morning of the wedding day, the village people came to congratulate Se Hun with donations they had prepared with sincerity in spite of poor living. As they saw *sundae* on the wedding table and *sundae* soup on their tables, they were struck with wonder.

"*Sundae* on the wedding table looks good. The long spiral *sundae* is symbolic of our hope that the bride and bridegroom will have many children and live long happily," said the oldest man in the village.

That day, Se Hun's mother sent *sundae* to the family of the bride and the village people who had failed to come to the wedding ceremony.

Later, the villagers would prepare *sundae* for a wedding ceremony and send some of it to the family of the in-laws. Preparing *sundae* for a wedding ceremony has since become a tradition for the whole country.

Sundae, unlike the European sausage, tastes unique and is highly nutritive for it is prepared with animals' blood, vegetables and meat.

Coriander Kimchi

In the middle of the period of the feudal Joson dynasty, there lived a young peasant, named Kudol, in a village in Phyongsan County, Hwanghae Province. Not only because he was tall and handsome but because he worked hard with a tender heart, he was loved by all the elderly in the village, who had daughters. At last he married a girl in the same village.

His forte was that he was very sensitive to the new.

Two years after he married, he had to perform a great task, the first of its kind he had to perform after his marriage–to get his younger sister married.

He had to play the role of her parents as they lived by relying on each other after losing them in their childhood. He recollected the days when they had lived a hand-to-mouth existence.

That was why he paid special attention to his sister's marriage. He paid a visit to every family that made a proposal to her so as to acquaint himself with the family and the suitor. But he could not find a good match for his sister.

When the background was okay, the suitor was not good, or vice versa. As he refused every one, some people said that he was so strict that his sister might never get married. But Kudol did not lend an ear to such remarks, and hardened his resolve to find out a manly man with a

good sense of judgement.

Only a man who can draw a borderline between what is true and what is wrong and act on the judgement, can live a life without regrets, he thought. His thought appropriate to an old man was an outcome of experiencing much more troubles than others.

What his parents had left for him was not so big–a straw-thatched house and a few patches of land. Firmly determined that he would feed and take good care of his sister, he had done his best. The villagers praised him as a self-made man. Through his harsh living, he had confirmed that if a man had a good sense of judgement, he could live out even on an isolated island.

Early in January one year, an old woman, one of his neighbours, called upon him with a young man from Songdo (Kaesong).

The young man's lustrous eyes made a good impression on Kudol. He said that if there was a girl who would fulfil filial duties to her parents-in-law as she would do her blood parents, he would marry her without asking about her appearance and property.

His words moved Kudol as he was bearing a sorrow of not having his parents to whom he could do filial duties. He thought that the man was a type he had been searching for so far.

A man who is faithful to his parents can devote himself to the country.

Kudol accepted his proposal, and promised to hold the wedding ceremony in spring.

Time passed, and the appointed day came.

At midday, the young man came to the village to take his spouse.

On the day after the ceremony was over, Kudol accompanied the procession to Songdo. They arrived the following day.

The wedding ceremony was held in the bridegroom's house.

At the table, Kudol feasted his eyes on the dishes. Such specialties of the Songdo area as *kyongdan*, *yumilgwa*, *umegi* and *sikhye* were laid on the table, and every food had its own unique taste.

As he found a vegetable with spicy sauce, he carefully took a taste of it with chopsticks. Its smell was disgusting.

Seeing him distort his face, an aunt of the bridegroom said with a smile on her face.

"Those from other regions used to distort their faces when they have the first taste of it. But, they soon get fascinated by it. Coriander is a good vegetable. It is efficacious against indigestion, food poisoning and measles. It is said that coriander has long been cultivated. There is a story about why the vegetable is widely cultivated here. When this town became the capital of Koryo, the number of houses suddenly increased, and many people suffered from stomachache. In order to make people eat coriander which is good for treating stomachache, doctors invented spicy sauce with coriander. Since then, coriander has become indispensable in our diet."

Her words whetted Kudol's appetite, and when he said that he wanted to get some seeds of it, she accepted the request with pleasure.

When the ceremony was over, he returned home with coriander seeds

and sowed them in the kitchen garden with his wife.

Nearly one month later, when the sprouted seeds grew one span tall, he told his wife to prepare spicy sauce with it.

What was surprising was that she liked it as much as the people in Songdo.

From that day, the spicy sauce became a must on the meal table.

Summer had gone and autumn rolled in.

One day, when he came back home after collecting firewood, Kudol saw his wife dressing a basketful of coriander.

"How can we eat it all?"

"Why don't we dry it like wild herbs?"

"I don't think it's a good idea. I've never heard that the people in Songdo eat it in that way."

What about making kimchi with it. Of course, I haven't heard about it in Songdo, either. But why can it be impossible?

"I think it would be good to make kimchi with it as we do with wild herbs," said Kudol.

"Wow, I'm a woman, but I've never thought about it."

A few days later, Kudol saw coriander kimchi placed on the table. The smell of the food, the first-ever kind of kimchi, gave him a strong appetite.

The sweet smell of the vegetable went well with the sour taste of kimchi. The couple took the meal with relish.

One night, more than two months after they began to eat coriander

kimchi, the wife took his hand and put it on her stomach.

As he was unaware of the reason, she said, “Can you feel something special in my belly?”

“No, nothing special.”

“Really? I’m serious.”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“Well… I’m pregnant.”

“Is it true?”

So excited, he threw off the quilts and got up.

“Calm down, darling. All the villagers may hear us.”

“I don’t care.”

She lowered her head on his laps.

“Thanks, darling.”

“Thanks for what?”

“You made me pregnant.”

“Well, it’s a natural happening when a couple shares the same bed.”

“Frankly speaking, it was impossible for me to get pregnant. Owing to indigestion I got during my childhood, I’ve suffered from a chill stomach and failed to become pregnant. So I’ve worried that you might expel me. When you suggested cultivating coriander, saying it is efficacious against indigestion, I was really happy.”

Kudol felt guilty conscience as he had been unaware of it even a little. He could not but look at her absent-mindedly.

“Strangely, the spicy sauce with coriander was delicious from the

first try as if it would be efficacious for treating my disease. Day after day, I felt better and my body got warmer. And we have eaten coriander kimchi, haven’t we? These days, I could feel a baby moving in my belly.”

Kudol realized that her body got fatter than before.

“So, I say thank you.”

He hugged his wife.

“I don’t deserve your thanks. I haven’t known your physical conditions. I was a fool.”

“No, darling. If you are not tender-hearted, my body will be the same as before. Only a man like you who thinks about what to do more for his home village can love his family and village, and further, contribute to the country.”

“Thanks for your sweet words.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

In spring the following year, the couple distributed coriander seeds among the villagers, and told them how to make kimchi with the vegetable.

Eating coriander kimchi, tasty and good for health, the villagers said that such good deed could be done only by Kudol, who was sensitive to the new.

The habit of making kimchi with coriander has since been handed down generation after generation in Hwanghae Province.

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